REUNION

of the

PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES,

U. S. A. and U. S.

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REUNION OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCHES, U. S. A. AND U. S.

I. The Burden of Proof

Christ, in the prayer that He offered on the night of the betrayal (John 17) clearly indicated that oneness among His followers is essential to the triumph of His cause in an unbelieving world.

We cannot rightly claim that this oneness is to be merely spiritual. Of course, it is primarily *in spirit,* but there must be a visible, outward manifestation, for the oneness is to be of such a nature that the world can see it. Active and positive co-operation, if not organic union in some form, would be required.

Throughout the entire Christian world the Holy Spirit seems now to be at work bringing into the hearts of believers the deep conviction that the Church is the body of Christ, and that the reunion of the various groups, so far as it can be accomplished without disloyalty to truth, is an imperative duty: witness the recent developments in Scotland, in Canada, and among the Methodists of our own country.

Among unbelievers there is increasing impatience with, and contempt for the Church because of her apparently needless divisions. This critical attitude is very like a rising tide.

Presbyterian organizations U. S. A. and U. S., covering in large part the same geographical territory, often in competition with each other, (sometimes not without strife) do not give to an unbelieving world evidence of oneness.

The continued division seems strange in view of the fact that the two communions are so nearly akin, doctrinally and historically. The world may well wonder why the competitive organizations are maintained. This continued separation seems all the more inexplicable when po-

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litically and economically the once divided nation has achieved oneness. Surely the Church might have been expected to have led the way instead of lagging so far behind.

There are two aspects in which the power of union, expressed in organization, is most greatly needed. One is general: The two million five hundred thousand Presbyterians in the U. S. A. and U. S. Churches, united, would exercise a much larger influence in facing moral issues that imperil the nation, than they can exercise, divided, as they are today. The other aspect is local: Synods, Presbyteries, and congregations U. S. A. and U. S., united, would be far more effective in meeting local needs than they are today, divided and over-lapping.

It is a deeply significant fact that in our border Synods such as West Virginia, Kentucky, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Texas, the members of both the U. S. A. and U. S. Churches earnestly desire and actively advocate reunion.

In view of these considerations it would seem that in the discussion of the reunion of the U. S. A. and U. S. Assemblies, the burden of proof rests upon those who oppose it. The question today may well be, not why we should reunite, but why we should remain divided.

II. Original Reasons for Separation

When the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States was organized in 1861, which Assembly is now known as the Southern or U. S., an address was issued stating the reasons for the separation from the Presbyterian Church U. S. A. Is it not well to consider carefully those reasons with a view to ascertaining whether or not they provide a sufficient warrant for continued separation?

The following excerpts from the "Address to the Churches of Jesus Christ throughout the Earth," issued in 1861, throw light on the question.

> "We have separated from our brethren of the North as Abraham separated from Lot, because we

are persuaded that the interests of true religion will be more effectually subserved by two independent churches, under the circumstances in which the two countries are placed, then by one united body:

> "1. In the first place the course of the last Assembly at Philadelphia conclusively shows that, if we should remain together, the political questions which divide us as citizens will be obtruded on our Church courts, and discussed by Christian ministers, and elders with all the acrimony, bitterness, and rancor with which such questions are usually discussed by men of the world. Our Assembly would present a mournful spectacle of strife and debate. Commissioners from the Northern would meet with Commissioners from the Southern Confederacy, to wrangle over the questions which have split them into two confederacies, and involved them in furious and bloody war. They would denounce each other, on the one hand, as tyrants and oppressors, and on the other as traitors and rebels."

Surely this first reason for a separate Southern Church is not valid today. We are no longer debating the right of the Southern States to secede from the Union.

> "2. As the unity of the human race is not disturbed by its division into countries and nations, so the unity of the spiritual seed of Christ is neither broken nor impaired by separation and division into various Church constitutions. Accordingly, in Protestant countries, church organizations have followed national lines, ... If it be desirable that each nation should contain a separate and an independent church, the Presbyteries of these Confederate States need no apology for bowing to the decree of Providence, which, in withdrawing their country from the government of the United States, has at the same time determined that they should withdraw from the Church of their fathers."

Manifestly, this second reason for a separate Southern Church no longer exists. The nation is one. In fact this argument strongly points to the wisdom of one Church in one State, which would mean reunion.

3. Although not listed as a third reason, the question of slavery is given as a radical difference, and the larger portion of the address is devoted to the statement of the position of the Southern Assembly on this question.

We read as follows, after the two above reasons have been listed:

> "In addition to this, there is one difference which so radically and fundamentally distinguishes the North and the South that it is becoming every day more and more apparent that the religious, as well as the secular, interests of both will be more effectually promoted by a complete and lasting separation. The antagonism of Northern and Southern sentiment on the subject of slavery lies at the root of all the difficulties which have resulted in the dismemberment of the Federal Union, and involved us in the horrors of an unnatural war. The Presbyterian Church in the United States has been enabled by the Divine Grace to pursue, for the most part, an eminently conservative, because a thoroughly Scriptural policy in relation to this delicate question. It has planted itself upon the Word of God, and utterly refused to make slaveholding a sin, or non-slaveholding a term of communion. But though both sections are agreed as to this general principle, it is not to be disguised that the North exercises a deep and settled antipathy to slavery itself, while the South is equally zealous in its defense."

Certainly this "difference," so candidly stated, no longer can be thought of as a reason for the separation of our churches. Indeed it should cause the Southern Church to judge with leniency actions taken by the U. S. A. Assemblies during the war between the States and immediately after that war.

III. Steps Taken in Establishing Correspondence

At once the question arises; upon what grounds did the Southern Assembly justify the separation after the Confederate States ceased to exist as a nation?

As a matter of fact even the establishment of fraternal

relations was not achieved until 1882, although steps in that direction were taken in 1870. At the beginning of this period (1870-1882) we find four barriers to the establishment of fraternal relations listed as follows (see Minutes of U. S. Assembly 1870):

1. The action of the U. S. A. Church in violating the principle of the separation of Church and State through political utterances deliberately pronounced year after year. (These were actions taken in connection with the war between the States.)

2. Total surrender of all the great testimonies of the Church to the fundamental doctrines of grace; (This was supposed to have been done in the Union of the New School and the Old School of the North, which occurred in 1870.)

3. Unconstitutional expulsion of some members from the U. S. A. Church, who later became members of the U. S. Church; (Again this has to do with a quarrel in war time.)

4. Injurious accusations preferred against the whole Southern Presbyterian Church, extending to the charge of heresy and blasphemy.

In the year 1873, the U. S. A. Assembly took the following action:

> "The General Assembly, deploring the divisions that have occurred, and that continue, among Presbyterians in the United States of America, and earnestly desiring to do whatever is consistent with duty and fidelity to the Lord toward healing these divisions; and, furthermore, having good reason to hope that the action contemplated in the following paper will promote and secure this happy result, do solemnly declare:
>
> "First, That, in accordance with a resolution unanimously adopted by each of the two bodies now constituting the reunited Church, all action touching the brethren adhering to the body popularly known as the Southern General Assembly, together with all action touching the brethren adhering to the body known as the Old School Synod of Missouri, has been,

since the reunion, and is now, null and void, and therefore of no binding effect, and not to be pleaded as a precedent in the future.

"Second, The Assembly also express confidence in the soundness of doctrine and in the Christian character of these brethren, and cannot doubt that a more intimate communion would lead to the speedy removal of the barriers that now separate those of like precious faith to increased mutual affection and esteem, and to a practical manifestation of oneness in Christ.

"Third, With regard to the civil magistrate, and the relation of Church and State, the Assembly deem it sufficient to call attention to the following statements and principles found in our Standards, to-wit:

"(1.) 'Synods and councils are to handle or conclude nothing but that which is ecclesiastical, and are not to intermeddle with civil affairs which concern the commonwealth, unless by way of humble petition in cases extraordinary, or by way of advice, for satisfaction of conscience, if they be thereunto required by the civil magistrate.' (Confession of Faith, Chap. XXXI, Sec. IV.)

"(2.) 'That God alone is Lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men, which are in anything contrary to His Word, or beside it in matters of faith or worship.' 'That all church power, whether exercised by the body in general or, in the way of representation, by delegated authority, is only ministerial or declarative. That is to say, that the Holy Scriptures are the only rule of faith and manners; that no church judicatory ought to pretend to make laws to bind the conscience in virtue of their own authority; and that all their decisions should be founded upon the revealed will of God.' (Form of Government, Chap. 1, Secs. I and VII.)

"Fourth, For the purpose of carrying out the spirit of the foregoing resolutions the Assembly will appoint two committees to confer with similar committees, if appointed by the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and by the Old School Synod of Missouri, to seek closer and more fraternal relations with these bodies."

In 1882, after twelve years of intermittent conference and discussion concerning the establishment of fraternal relations, the U. S. Assembly took the following action:

> "In order to remove all difficulties in the way of that full and formal fraternal correspondence which, on our part, we are prepared to accept, we adopt the following minute:
>
> "That, while receding from no principle, we do hereby declare our regret for and withdrawal of all expressions of our Assembly which may be regarded as reflecting upon, or offensive to, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.
>
> "Resolved, That a copy of this paper be sent by telegraph to the General Assembly, now in session at Springfield, Ill., for their prayerful consideration, and *mutatis mutandis,* for their reciprocal concurrence, as affording a basis for the exchange of delegates forthwith."

To which the U. S. A. Assembly, 1882 replied:

> "The following report from the Committee on Correspondence was adopted this morning: The Moderator is instructed to telegraph to the Moderator of the General Assembly in session at Atlanta, that his telegram is received with warm enthusiasm by this Assembly; and, in order to remove all difficulties, in the way of that full and formal fraternal correspondence between the two Assemblies, which we are, on our part, prepared to accept, we adopt the following, viz: Whilst receding from no principle, we do hereby declare our regret for, and withdrawal of, all expressions of our Assembly which may be regarded as reflective upon or offensive to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and we renew the expression of our warm fraternal regard for all who compose its communion, and our readiness to exchange delegates forthwith."

An unofficial telegram from the Moderator of the U. S. A. Assembly (Dr. Herrick Johnson) to the Moderator of the U. S. Assembly caused a brief delay in the consummation of the agreement relative to fraternal correspond-

ence but before the adjournment of the Assemblies said agreement was reached.

The following telegram was sent by the U. S. Assembly:

> "Resolved, 1st, That this Assembly does hereby declare its entire satisfaction with the full and explicit terms in which the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America has expressed its 'reciprocal concurrence' in the paper transmitted to said Assembly on fraternal correspondence.
>
> "2nd, That we do unfeignedly rejoice and render thanksgiving to God in an event suited to take away the reproach of alienation between bodies holding the same Standards of faith, and tending to bring peace to our borders.
>
> "3rd, That inasmuch as it is impracticable at this date to have an interchange of delegates, the Assembly does hereby appoint Rev. Wm. Brown, D. D., Rev. T. A. Hoyt, D. D., and Hon. D. M. Estes, principals; and Rev. R. P. Farris, D. D., Rev. H. C. Alexander, D. D., and Hon. Patrick Joyce, alternates, to bear to the next General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America our cordial Christian salutations."

To this action there were only four dissenting votes.

Promptly the following telegram was received from the U. S. A. Assembly:

> "The following delegates to visit the General Assembly to meet in Lexington, Ky., in 1883, have been unanimously elected by this Assembly: S. J. Niccolls, D. D., Thomas S. Hastings, D. D., Herrick Johnson, D. D., E. P. Humphrey, D. D., S. Irenaeus Prime, D. D., Hon. S. M. Moore and Hon. William Strong, principals; and Arthur Mitchell, D. D., and Hon. William E. Dodge, alternates. See Luke 2:14."

In the 1883 U. S. Assembly efforts were made to re-open the question. This the Assembly refused to do.

In connection with the withdrawal of aspersions and charges it is well to bear in mind the action of the U. S. A. Assembly in 1904 as follows:

"Whereas, It is known to this Assembly that the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, now in session at Mobile, Ala., has before it Overtures from several of its Presbyteries looking to closer relations with this Assembly; and,

"Whereas, We earnestly desire to remove all obstacles to such relations, now therefore be it

"Resolved, (1) That this General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America hereby removes all aspersions and charges of any and every kind made by previous Assemblies, reflecting on the Christian character of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and is ready at any time to confer on the subject of closer relations, whenever such conference shall be agreeable to the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States."

IV. Barriers to Reunion

In 1887 the first definite steps were taken looking to the reunion of the U. S. A. and U. S. Churches. At that time three barriers were named by the U. S. Assembly:

1. The question of the spiritual mission of the Church;

2. The question of separate Churches for the Negroes;

3. The question of ecclesiastical boards.

In 1894 the following barriers to reunion were listed by our Assembly:

1. Differences in views concerning relationship of the Church of Christ to Civil Government;

2. The question of an independent Negro Church;

3. Difference between the Assemblies as to woman's sphere and work in the Church;

4. God's blessings upon our Church in its separate work;

5. The fact that, should organic union take place, property interests in the Southern Church would be

seriously jeopardized in the event of any subsequent withdrawal.

In 1919 the U. S. Assembly catalogued the following items that must be safe-guarded in the contemplation of organic union:

1. Sound doctrine;
2. Just and effective discipline;
3. Plenary inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures;
4. The vicarious atonement;
5. Spiritual mission of the Church;
6. Position of the negro constituents in the South.

As we review these lists of barriers it is interesting to note how the reasons have changed; only one, namely, the spiritual mission of the Church, remaining as an abiding factor.

Manifestly some of the reasons proposed against reunion are not really basic. They are important matters concerning which a working agreement could and should be reached.

It seems that when one objection to reunion is removed another is proposed. For instance, the derogatory statements made during the War between the States and the question of separate negro churches no longer constitute a barrier; but in our recent General Assembly a new objection was voiced, namely, that the U. S. A. Church has lost in membership during the past few years, while we have gained. However, our small gain would scarcely seem to warrant self-righteousness in this regard.

It is also interesting to note that within comparatively recent years the Southern Church voted favorably on the question of organic union with the United Presbyterian Church, although that Church differed from us on several of these very points.

Perhaps greater than all other barriers has been the inequality in size between the U. S. A. and U. S. Churches

and the determination on the part of the Southern Church not to be swallowed up.

V. Types of Reunion That Have Been Proposed

In 1919 the Southern Assembly listed, through a report of an *ad interim* committee, five proposed courses of action:

> "1. Complete organic union;
>
> "2. Organic union according to the so-called 'Synodical Plan';
>
> "3. Organic union on the basis of Provincial Assemblies, with one supreme National Assembly as the cap-stone of the system;
>
> "4. A federal body having only advisory powers;
>
> "5. A Federal Union with clearly defined powers and responsibilities and which at the same time conserves the autonomy of the constituent Churches in doctrine and discipline, as well as in all other matters of local interest, including the tenure of Church property and other material assets."

It is a well known fact that a detailed plan of Federal Union was formulated by able leaders in our Church and approved by our Assembly. However, it was not acceptable to the U. S. A. Church and to many in the U. S. Church, accomplishing as it would little more than is now accomplished by a somewhat similar grouping of the Presbyterian and Reformed Churches.

It would seem clear that complete unmodified organic union is unacceptable to the Southern Church.

This leaves two proposals, that of union through Provincial Assemblies and that of union through Regional Synods. Either of these two plans might be successfully used as the basis of reunion or a combination of the two plans may give us a solution. There are, however, two reasons that point to the use of the Synod as the key to the problem:

1. Through its use we would not have to add another church court, as would be the case in the use of the Provincial Assembly Plan.

2. The Synod, as we have it today, is a more or less ineffective court. A change in its size, its functions and its authority could be made with a minimum of readjustment in our governmental scheme.

So far as I know the use of the Synod as the key to the problem was first suggested in an article which appeared in the Presbyterian Standard of Charlotte, N. C., September 26, 1917.

In 1918 the U. S. A. sub-committee in conference with a committee of the U. S. Church proposed the following Plan of Reunion which seemed to some in the South to meet the requirements of the U. S. Church. However, at that time the U. S. Church was looking only toward a form of federation and the proposed basis of reunion was rejected. The Plan is as follows:

PLAN OF REUNION PROPOSED BY THE SUB-COMMITTEE OF THE U. S. A. CHURCH IN CONFERENCE WITH COMMITTEE OF U. S. CHURCH, 1918 (Minutes Southern Assembly, p. 150).

"It is proposed to submit the following plan to the Assemblies of both Churches in May, 1918, for their information and as outlining a possible basis for action by the Assemblies of some subsequent year.

PREAMBLE

"Believing that the interests of the Redeemer's Kingdom in the United States and in the world would be promoted by the removal of our divisions, and that the two bodies bearing substantially the same name and having practically the same Constitution, cannot be justified in maintaining separate and, in some respects, rival organizations by any but most imperative reasons; we are now clearly of the opinion that the reunion of these bodies ought to be accomplished.

"Article 1. The two Presbyterian Churches in the United States of America, namely, the one whose General Assembly convened in the Central Presbyterian Church in the city of Dallas, Texas, on the 17th day of May, 1917,

and the one whose General Assembly met in the South Highlands Presbyterian Church in the city of Birmingham, Ala., on the same day, shall be reunited as one Church, under its original name, and possessing all the legal and corporate rights and powers pertaining to the Church previous to the division in 1861, and all the legal and corporate rights and powers which the separate Churches have possessed and exercised since 1861 and do now possess and exercise.

"Article 2. The reunion shall be effected on the doctrinal and ecclesiastical basis of the Standards of the two Churches; and the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments shall be acknowledged to be the inspired Word of God, and the only infallible rule of faith and practice; and the Confessions of Faith shall continue to be sincerely received and adopted as containing the system of doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures.

"Article 3. Subscription to the Standards—All candidates for ordination to the ministry must subscribe to the Westminster Standards as containing the System of Doctrine taught in the Holy Scriptures, which are still the terms of subscription as required by the Standards prior to 1861 and which were judiciously [*sic*] interpreted by the Assembly of 1910 as including acceptance of the Confessional Doctrines of the inspiration and inerrancy of the Scriptures, the Virgin Birth, the Miracles, the atoning work and bodily resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, a deliverance which was reaffirmed by the Assembly of 1916.

"Article 4. The Assembly—As provided in the Westminster Standards, the Assembly shall have final authority in all questions affecting the Doctrine and Constitution of the Church and shall exercise direct ecclesiastical control over the combined missionary and benevolent Committees and Boards of the Reunited Church.

"Article 5. The Synods—The powers of Synods shall be so defined and exercised, and Synods may be so combined geographically as to secure the largest possible degree of constitutional, local self-government. Educational institutions shall remain as they now are so far as jurisdiction over them by ecclesiastical judicatories is concerned.

"Article 6. Colored Presbyteries and Synods—As already arranged by the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A.,

separated colored Presbyteries and Synods may be continued or erected.

"Article 7. Missions—Money raised by specific requests of any judicatory of the reunited Church for mission work within its own bounds shall be expended only as directed by said judicatory. This includes the action of Sessions, Presbyteries, Synods and the General Assembly.

"Article 8. Church and State—While commending to all its members devoted loyalty to the nation and maintaining its duty of moral leadership the reunited Church will continue to recognize the principle of the separation of Church and State, as first announced by the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church in 1729, and should maintain the spiritual character of the Church as separated from the kingdom of this world and having no other head than the Lord, Jesus Christ."

VI. The Question Before the Presbyteries

Our General Assembly of 1937 erected a Permanent Committee on Co-operation and Union composed of nine ministers and ruling elders with authority "to explore the possibilities of co-operation and union with other Presbyterian bodies and to report each year its progress to the General Assembly."

Seven members of this Permanent Committee reported as follows to our Assembly of 1938, concerning their conference with the U. S. A. committee.

"Your representatives went to the conference with the thought that a plan of reunion based on the idea 'regional assemblies' would get the approval of a great many members of our Church. After a long and sympathetic discussion, however, the conclusion was reached that the 'regional assembly' plan would not be best, if thereby a fifth court would be added to our already somewhat elaborate organization. The Scotch Church has only three courts: namely, the Session, the Presbytery, and the General Assembly.

"But your Committee has concluded that another plan might be found which would eliminate the objectionable

and attain whatever desirable features the 'regional assembly' might have. That plan would be to give to the Synods enlarged powers by reducing correspondingly the powers of the General Assembly so as amply to assure local self-government. The plan would also contemplate the possible enlarging of the membership through enlarging the territorial boundaries of the Synods so that they would become what might be termed 'provincial synods.' The members of the U. S. A. Committee were explicit and emphatic in asserting that they would be quite ready and glad for all powers possible, consistent with maintaining the integrity of the reunited Church, to be taken from the Assembly and given to the Synods."

Two members of the Permanent Committee brought in a dissenting statement.

The General Assembly dissolved the Permanent Committee of nine and created a Permanent Committee of seventeen, one member to be chosen by each Synod, and gave to this larger Committee the same powers that had been bestowed upon the former Committee.

The Permanent Committee of seventeen presented a unanimous report to the Assembly of 1939, as follows:

Report of Permanent Committee on Co-operation and Union

"Your Permanent Committee on Co-operation and Union unanimously reports that it has conferred with the Department of Co-operation and Union of the Presbyterian Church U. S. A. and finds that they will look with favor upon a plan of reunion based on the following general principles, to-wit:

"1. The standards of the two Churches to be the basis of the reunion.

"2. A Brief Statement of the Church's faith to be drawn up based upon the Brief Statement adopted by the General Assembly of the U. S. A. Church in 1902 and the Brief

Statement adopted by the General Assembly of the U. S. Church in 1913.

"3. Provision to be made for local self-government by the erection of reorganized regional Synods, to which would be committed final authority in all local affairs. Final jurisdiction not to go beyond the Synod as to all matters not delegated to the General Assembly. These Synods to take the place of our present Synods.

"4. The Presbyteries to remain as they are, subject to such amalgamation or change of boundaries after reunion as might seem best to their reorganized Synods. Church Sessions to remain as at present, subject to combination of congregations as a result of union under the authority of the Presbytery. The authority of the Session and of the Presbytery to remain unchanged.

"5. The unity of the Church to be maintained and expressed through a General Assembly, which, in co-operation with the Presbyteries, would have authority in regard to any change of the constitution; would administer the general interests of the reunited Church, such as Foreign Missions, Publication, Education, Pensions, National Home Missions; would be the court of final appeal in all cases that affect the doctrine or constitution of the Church; would be the court of final appeal in all cases that involve interests extending beyond a given Synod. The basis of representation in the General Assembly to be a matter of further study.

"6. The control of educational institutions to be worked out according to the requirements of individual cases.

"7. While commending to all its members devoted loyalty to the Nation and maintaining its duty of moral leadership, the reunited Church will continue to recognize the principle of the separation of Church and State, as first announced by the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church in 1729, and should maintain the spiritual character of the Church as separated from the kingdom of this world and having no other head than the Lord Jesus Christ.

"8. Negro Congregations, Presbyteries and Synods are to continue as at present except where they may be combined.

"Your Committee also suggests that in any further exploration of the possibility of reunion upon the principles enumerated in the foregoing declaration the following matters should be carefully considered, to-wit:

"1. The question of the size of the proposed reorganized regional Synods.

"2. The question of maintaining within each reorganized Synod, if it is of sufficient size, headquarters for Assembly's Work; or, if the Synods are more numerous, following largely the present boundaries, the question of maintaining regional headquarters for the Assembly's Work in several places, each to serve the adjaçent Synods.

"3. The question of the relation between the Home Mission work of the Synod, including its Presbyteries, and that of the General Assembly; and the question of providing that the National Home Missions be largely an equalizing agency; and the question of the administration of the Home Mission work in a given Synod being under the final authority of the Synod; and the question of making like provision in regard to Religious Education and Evangelism.

"Your Committee respectfully asks the instructions of the General Assembly as to whether or not your Committee shall carry on its explorations along the foregoing lines."

The Assembly of 1939 sent this report to the Presbyteries for advice. The action of the Assembly is as follows:

"That the General Assembly refer this report to the Presbyteries without expression of opinion concerning it and ask that, before the next General Assembly, each of the Presbyteries give advice as to the whole question of union."

The definite question upon which the Presbyteries are to vote is this: Shall our Permanent Committee proceed

to explore the possibility of reunion with the U. S. A. Church on the basis of the eight principles enumerated in the report of said Committee. At the same time each Presbytery is asked to express its ideas on the whole question of union. The action of the Presbyteries will not legally bind the 1940 Assembly, but will give it information concerning the attitude of the Presbyteries toward the question submitted.

It is important that the Church at large fully understand these eight principles which were approved by the U. S. A. Assembly of 1939, and were submitted by the U. S. Assembly to the Presbyteries for advice.

In the discussion careful attention must also be given to the suggestions made by our Permanent Committee relative to matters that should be considered in any further exploration of the possibility of reunion upon the basis of the eight principles.

We must also bear in mind that the statement of the eight principles is necessarily in general terms, merely opening the way for detailed exploration.

Let us consider these eight principles one by one:

I. The Standards of the Reunited Church

"The standards of the two Churches to be the basis of reunion."

This means that in the event of reunion, the present confession of Faith and Catechisms of the U. S. A. Church and the U. S. Church be combined. They are basically in agreement at the present time.

II. A Brief Statement

"A Brief Statement of the Church's faith to be drawn up based upon the Brief Statement adopted by the General Assembly of the U. S. A. Church in 1902 and the Brief Statement adopted by the General Assembly of the U. S. Church in 1913."

At once the question arises as to the soundness of the

Brief Statement adopted by the U. S. A. Church in 1902. Two articles in it throw light on this subject:

"Art. 2. Of Revelation: We believe that God is revealed in nature, in history, and in the heart of man; that He has made gracious and clearer revelations of Himself to men of God who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit; and that Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh, is the brightness of the Father's glory and the express image of His person. We gratefully receive the Holy Scriptures, given by inspiration to be the faithful record of God's gracious revelations and the sure witness to Christ, as the Word of God, the only infallible rule of faith and life."

"Art. 8. Of Our Lord Jesus Christ: We believe in and confess the Lord Jesus Christ, the only Mediator between God and man, who, being, the Eternal Son of God, for us men and for our salvation became truly man, being conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary, without sin; unto us He has revealed the Father, by His Word and Spirit making known the perfect will of God: for us He fulfilled all righteousness and satisfied eternal justice, offering Himself a perfect sacrifice upon the cross to take away the sin of the world; for us He rose from the dead and ascended into Heaven, where He ever intercedes for us; in our hearts joined to Him by faith, He abides forever as the indwelling Christ; over us, and over all of us, He rules: wherefore, unto Him we render love, obedience, and adoration as our Prophet, Priest, and King forever."

III. Local Self-Government

"Provision to be made for local self-government by the erection of reorganized regional Synods, to which would be committed final authority in all local affairs. Final jurisdiction not to go beyond the Synod as to all matters not delegated to the General Assembly. These Synods to take the place of our present Synods."

One of the questions to be carefully considered is the size of the proposed reorganized Synods.

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IV. The Presbyteries and the Sessions

"The Presbyteries to remain as they are, subject to such amalgamation or change of boundaries after reunion as might seem best to their reorganized Synods. Church Sessions to remain as at present, subject to combination of congregations as a result of union under the authority of the Presbytery. The authority of the Session and of the Presbytery to remain unchanged."

V. The General Assembly

"The unity of the Church to be maintained and expressed through a General Assembly, which, in co-operation with the Presbyteries, would have authority in regard to any change of the constitution; would administer the general interests of the reunited Church, such as Foreign Missions, Publication, Education, Pensions, National Home Missions; would be the court of final appeal in all cases that affect the doctrine or constitution of the Church; would be the court of final appeal in all cases that involve interests extending beyond a given Synod. The basis of representation in the General Assembly to be a matter of further study."

The Assembly is (1) to be the final court in all cases that affect the doctrine and constitution of the Church; (2) to be the final court in cases that involve interests extending beyond a given Synod; (3) to administer certain general work.

Matters for careful consideration in this connection are:

"The question of maintaining within each reorganized Synod, if it is of sufficient size, headquarters for Assembly's Work; or, if the Synods are more numerous, following largely the present boundaries, the question of maintaining regional headquarters for the Assembly's Work in several places, each to serve the adjacent Synods."

"The question of the relation between the Home Mission work of Synod, including its Presbyteries, and that of

the General Assembly; and the question of providing that the National Home Missions be largely an equalizing agency; and the question of the administration of the Home Mission work in a given Synod being under the final authority of the Synod; and the question of making like provision in regard to Religious Education and Evangelism."

VI. Educational Institutions

"The control of educational institutions to be worked out according to the requirements of individual cases."

VII. Church and State

"While commending to all its members devoted loyalty to the Nation and maintaining its duty of moral leadership, the reunited Church will continue to recognize the principle of the separation of Church and State, as first announced by the General Synod of the Presbyterian Church in 1729, and should maintain the spiritual character of the Church as separated from the kingdom of this world and having no other head than the Lord Jesus Christ."

The action in 1729 was a declaration of the independence of the Church from the State, a vital principle today. Safeguards against the intermeddling of the Church with the State would also be necessary.

VIII. The Negro

"Negro Congregations, Presbyteries, and Synods are to continue as at present except where they may be combined."

Both the U. S. A. and the U. S. Churches already have provision for separate Negro Congregations, Presbyteries, and Synods.

Many of us believe that these eight principles constitute a basis for the working out of a detailed plan in which the ideas that are dear to our Southern Church will become controlling factors in a reunited Presbyterianism.

If authorized to proceed the Permanent Committee may fail to work out with the U. S. A. Committee a plan satisfactory to itself. Then no harm will have been done. On the other hand, the Permanent Committee may be able to work out a plan that in its judgment safeguards the interests of our Church. In that event our Assembly will have presented to it a detailed plan of reunion on the basis of Regional Synods. A similar thing was done in reference to the proposed Federal Union. Unless we are opposed to reunion with the U. S. A. Church on any basis it would seem wise to explore again and again until we discover a plan that will be satisfactory to both Churches.

But some oppose even the consideration of reunion, and the reasons now given for this position are three: (1) The Auburn Affirmation; (2) The recent expulsion by the U. S. A. Church of a few ministers on the grounds of insubordination; (3) The steps taken by the U. S. A. Assembly looking toward union with the Episcopal Church.

Certain facts relative to these three issues should be borne in mind:

(1) The Auburn Affirmation, signed by 1283 ministers in the U. S. A. Church was issued fifteen years ago.

It was occasioned by the repeated action of the General Assemblies in declaring five doctrines essential, namely,

(a) Complete inerrancy of the Scriptures; (b) The Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ; (c) The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ "to satisfy Divine justice and to reconcile us to God"; (d) The bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ; (e) The miracles wrought by Jesus Christ.

Some signed the Affirmation as a protest against the action of the Assembly in erecting special tests of orthodoxy when the constitution of the Church contains a basic and sufficient test.

At about the same time an effort was made in our own Southern Assembly to secure similar deliverances on these five points. This was defeated under the leadership of

some of our older and more conservative ministers, defeated on the very ground that the Assembly has not the authority to erect special tests of this kind.

Doubtless others signed the Affirmation because they did not accept these five points. These men evidently believed in the infallibility of the Bible in matters of faith and life but not in its inerrancy in scientific matters; they believed in the Incarnation but were not at all sure about the Virgin Birth. In the Affirmation itself we find this statement: "We all hold most earnestly to these great facts and doctrines (the Inspiration of the Bible and the Incarnation, the Atonement, the Resurrection, and the Continuing Life and Supernatural Power of our Lord Jesus Christ). We all believe from our hearts that the writers of the Bible were inspired of God; that Jesus Christ was God manifest in the flesh; that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, and through Him we have our redemption; that having died for our sins He arose from the dead and is our ever living Saviour; that in His earthly ministry He wrought many mighty works, and by His vicarious death and unfailing presence He is able to save to the uttermost."

It is a well known fact that in these past fifteen years there has been a decided movement toward theological conservatism. The modernism which then influenced sections of the U. S. A. Church is now discredited.

The conference of the U. S. A. Assembly with the Episcopal Church, relative to union, is deeply significant as revealing its attitude toward the person of our Lord.

These and similar considerations should be borne in mind when the fifteen-year-old Auburn Affirmation is used as an argument against reunion.

(2) There are a few things that should be said relative to the expulsion by the U. S. A. Church of certain ministers who defied the authority of the Church and disobeyed its instruction to withdraw from an independent mission board.

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Their allegiance to that board was not similar to membership in the Y. M. C. A. or the American Bible Society. The new board was builded in the Presbyterian Church in direct opposition to the established agencies of the Church.

Imagine, by way of illustration, that a group of ministers in one of our Presbyteries, desiring to emphasize certain doctrines, should erect a new Home Missions Committee, the purpose of which would be to gather funds from the Churches of the Presbytery, and to establish competing Presbyterian congregations. What do you think that Presbytery would do about it?

(3) Just a word concerning the conferences of the U. S. A. Assembly with the Episcopal Church, relative to union.

As I have said, this certainly indicates loyalty to the person of our Divine Saviour, for the Episcopal Church stands firmly for the Incarnation and the Virgin Birth of Jesus Christ.

However, even the most optimistic advocates of that union recognize that it cannot be consummated for many, many years. Perhaps it will never be realized. Certainly, in the event of the reunion of the U. S. A. and U. S. Churches, our Southern group would have a large influence in determining the issue. Many of us hold in high regard the Episcopal Church and would not be averse to union with it, if such union can be had on terms that seem just and right and true.

Let us conclude with the thought already suggested: Unless we are opposed to reunion with the U. S. A. Church on any basis, it would certainly seem wise to explore again and again until we discover a plan that will be satisfactory to both Churches.

Our Presbyteries are now asked to give advice to the Assembly on the entire question of union, specifically as to further exploration along the line of reunion through Regional Synods.